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Japan-India Joint Security Declaration: Towards an Asia-wide Security Architecture?

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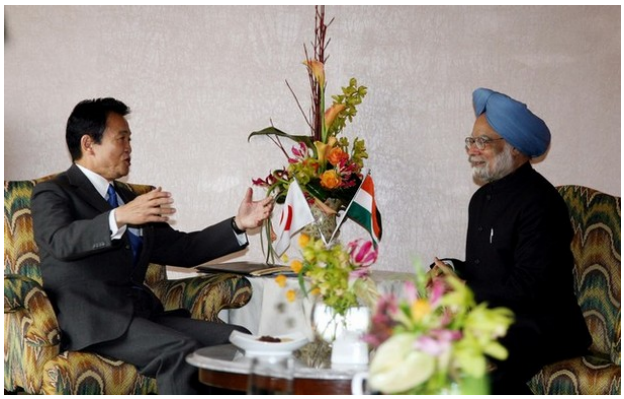
As Japan and India move toward bilateral security cooperation, it is not surprising that Prime Ministers AsÅ Tar Å and *Manmohan Singh have vigorously denied that the arrangements were aimed at counterbalancing China. But will Beijing read it in this way?*

Japan's revised ODA Charter, a 2003 revision of the original 1991 set of principles governing Japan's Overseas Development Assistance, proscribes aid to countries producing weapons of mass destruction. Thus it is all the more perplexing that in September this year, Japan joined the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group, which controls the export and sale of nuclear technology, to approve a waiver on trade with India. In joining the Washington consensus on this issue, Prime Minister AsÅ is obviously moving into uncharted waters if he is seen as abandoning Japan's non-nuclear principles and pandering to Japanese companies eager for a slice of India's nuclear energy market. It is worth recalling that India's failure to ratify the NPT continues to raise public hackles in Japan, just as Prime Minister Hashimoto RyutarÅ suspended all but humanitarian aid to India in response to India's nuclear tests conducted in May 1998.

Prime Minister Singh might also be entering uncharted waters as he draws Japan into potentially conflict-prone and extra-legal engagements in protecting sea-lanes and "fighting terrorism." We wonder about the future multilateral parameters of this security architecture, though presently couched in the language of bilateralism. Controversially, for China and Russia, in 2007 Japanese warships joined with India along with Australia, Singapore and the US in the Malabar series of war games, which many analysts viewed as directed toward China. Are these developments stepping stones towards extending US-led security frameworks in the form of open and inclusive regional frameworks in Asia? Geoffrey C. Gunn

On Wednesday, October 22nd, in Tokyo, Prime Ministers AsÅ TarÅ and Manmohan Singh issued a landmark Japan-India Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation -- only the second such framework document on defense cooperation to be issued by Tokyo with a foreign partner (apart from its alliance arrangement with the U.S.).



Then Foreign Minister AsÅ and P.M. Singh in a December 14, 2006 meeting in Tokyo

The Japan-India declaration, though modeled on a previous March 2007 Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, represents a paler version of its Aussie counterpart. Substituted in its preamble is a reference to "similar perceptions of the evolving [regional security] environment" as opposed to the more forthright characterization of "shared security interests" in the Japan-Australia declaration.

Equally, a more loosely worded "common commitment" to democratic norms is presented in place of the tighter Tokyo-Canberra formulation which identifies "shared values and interests" as the essential underlying basis of their bilateral relationship.

Notably absent, further, in the Japan-India Joint Declaration, and in contrast to the Japan-Australia Declaration, is the lack of a reference of linkage of their proposed security tie-up with either country's bilateral security relationship with the United States -- let alone any commitment to consolidate and strengthen their nascent trilateral security cooperation.

Prominently mentioned, however, in their Joint Declaration is a common pledge to safeguard their vulnerable sea lines of communications. Less clear though is how substance is to be injected into such purpose - this, even as 18 Indian sailors spend a forty second night in the captivity of Somali pirates and on a hijacked Japanese-owned vessel, no less.

The Indian approach to this incident, so far, has been resolutely national - further deployment of formal anti-piracy patrols by Indian warships in pirate-infested waters, even as New Delhi disfavors joining the ad-hoc international coalition (the U.S.-led Combined Task Force 150) battling piracy in these very waters.

Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces, meantime, while engaged in refueling activities for CTF-150 vessels in the Indian Ocean, operate within the effective bounds of Japan's domestic policing laws, possessing as yet neither the constitutional leeway to engage in forcible maritime interdiction on the high seas with arms drawn nor the authority to escort vessels other than Japan-registered ones.

Japanese refueling mission in the Indian Ocean

In fact, regardless of constitutional authority or legal writ, a pattern of bounded limits to the operational scope of cooperation seems to be settling in within Japan-India security relations. Even as the rhetoric of their bilateral declarations races ahead, functional cooperation remains geared towards low profile logistical cooperation within a framework that coexists with their respective defense arrangements with the United States, but lack any manifestation of 'jointness'.

Both countries share, independently with the U.S., defense arrangements that authorize their respective country's participation in trilateral and multi-national defense endeavors, regardless of geographic scope, and arguably even for cooperative operations that lack a United Nations mandate. Yet even after three years vested with such authority, neither India nor Japan participate jointly, or in a trilateral format with Washington, on the central global security challenge of the day - the war on terror, either on land or within its maritime component, anti-piracy patrols included.

On the defense sales/defense technology cooperation front, four years after ex-Prime Minister Koizumi's hand-picked panel called for a "case-by-case consideration" for relaxing Japan's long-standing arms export principles vis-à-vis third countries (i.e. excluding the U.S.), there is little useful to show on the Indo-Japanese front. Indications, going forward, remain bleak, as evidenced by the failure of such cooperation to warrant favorable mention in their recent Joint Declaration.

Five years after Japan's revised ODA Charter called for the strategic use of ODA, the bulk of the India disbursal - albeit the largest such country disbursal - remains restricted to upgrading basic infrastructural deficiencies in India's publicly-owned and poorly managed railroad sector. A proposal to direct ODA spending towards an ambitious Indian shipbuilding and ocean security program, including functional areas such as sea-bed exploration, oceanographic surveys, ship-lift capabilities, etc, remains stuck on the drawing board.

While a revised Japanese National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) in late-2009 presents an opportunity to expand the scope of Japanese security cooperation with India, much like the 2004 NDPO which had elevated and geographically widened Japan's participation in "international peace cooperation activities" beyond the East Asian region, the apprehension remains that the fractured politics of Nagatacho will continue to present a paralyzing roadblock.

On the bilateral economic front meantime, the inability to finalize a Japan-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement covering trade, investment and services remains a lesser worry. More fundamentally, and as highlighted in a recent METI white paper, India remains the rare instance of an Asian market where both the export and import intensity of Japanese trade remains in decline.

The villain of the piece here remains the skewed skill-intensive and employment inelastic pattern of Indian export development - with barely a handful of Indian SMEs integrated within the vast labor-intensive rungs of the Japan-driven, Asia-wide production networks. In marked contrast to the light-manufacturing sector in China, the import content of India's SME sector is as little as 10 per cent.

A similar process of policy self-marginalization seems also to be creeping within India's participation in the nascent Japan-led, Asia-

wide financial network of swap arrangements, as structural savings deficits and the (dearth of) sophistication of domestic bond markets accentuates New Delhi's lack of congruence with financial market structures and monetary, exchange rate and reserve management regimes further east.

Japan and India in a Future Asian Order

At bottom, the fundamental orientation of Japan-India relations remains hinged on the future direction of Asia's dynamic geo-political order: whether economic complementarities will facilitate more advanced norms of regional socialization or will militarization and arms racing give way to deeper polarization.

In this regard, it remains to be seen whether an economically anemic Japan-India bilateral partnership with a top-heavy security component (albeit, at present, more in intent than content) will trump either country's economically more densely-linked but strategically more circumspect relationship with China.

That said, however, ex-Prime Minister Abe ShinzÅ's idealization of a 'broader Asia', situated at the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Ocean and seamlessly enfolding the Asia-Pacific maritime periphery and the rising continental core on the basis of principles of pluralism and openness, remains an intriguing concept worthy of greater study.

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